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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Note by the Secretary-General

At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, contained in the annex to its resolution 48/96 of 20 December 1993.[1] These 22 Rules provide a framework to further implement the goals of equality and full participation of disabled persons in social life and development set forth in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982.[2] In section IV, paragraph 2, of the Standard Rules, it is stipulated that the Rules shall be monitored within the framework of the sessions of the Commission for Social Development. The appointment of a Special Rapporteur to monitor their implementation within the framework of the Commission for Social Development was also envisaged in that paragraph. In March 1994, the Secretary-General appointed Bengt Lindqvist (Sweden) Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development. Mr. Lindqvist prepared three reports for the consideration of the Commission during his mandate,[3] which was renewed in 1997[4] and in 2000.[5] In June 2003, the Secretary-General appointed Sheikha Hessa Al-Thani (Qatar) Special Rapporteur for the period 2003-2005. The Special Rapporteur submitted an oral report to the forty-second session of the Commission for Social Development outlining her plan of work.[6] In its resolution 2004/15, the Economic and Social Council requested the Special Rapporteur to submit a report on the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules to the Commission for Social Development at its forty-third session.

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The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission the report of the Special Rapporteur on monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities during the period 2003-2005.

Notes

[1] Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm.

[2] A/37/351/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, sect. VIII; available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/diswpa00.htm.

[3] A/52/56, available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dismsre0.htm; E/CN.5/2000/3, annex, available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disecn003e0.htm, and E/CN.5/2002/4, available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disecn520024e0.htm.

[4] Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/19, available from http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1997/eres1997-19.htm.

[5] Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/10, available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/ecosoc2000-10.htm.

[6] Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/srcsocd42.htm.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development

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I. Introduction

1. I would like to begin by thanking the Commission for Social Development for its support and guidance throughout this year, and all the Governments that supported my activities, especially the Government of Qatar for its continued financial support to the Office of the Special Rapporteur.

2. One year ago, when I stood here before you to present my first report to the Commission on Social Development, I was both honoured and awed by the responsibility entrusted to me and the enormity of the task I was undertaking. I was also keenly aware of the challenges ahead and eager to meet them.

3. I am pleased to report to you on the progress made during this year — it has been over 10 years since the adoption of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and 20 months since my appointment as Special Rapporteur — at a moment in history when the disability movement worldwide is at its most vital and when Governments and civil society are collaborating to draft an International Convention aimed at promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disability.

A. Guiding principles

4. Throughout my work and regardless of the nature of the activities, there have been two main principles that guided my work. The first is the approach taken in carrying out the tasks and activities, and the second is the overarching goal towards which all activities are aimed.

1. The approach

5. During the past year I have striven to adopt a constructive and affirmative approach, preferring to highlight the positive and celebrate the successes, while at the same time emphasizing the need for greater achievement and more concerted efforts.

2. The overall goal

6. While continuing to monitor, assess, evaluate and advocate for more meaningful and deeper implementation of the Standard Rules, I have not lost sight of the fact that the ultimate goal of all the work being done is the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.

7. Equalization of opportunities is a universal concept measured against universal norms, which should apply to all cultures and countries equally. The challenge is that we live in an increasingly diverse universe where levels of development, cultural values, attitudes, norms, needs and services differ from one region to another, one country to another, and even within the same country.

8. While some countries are trying to perfect the conditions of equalization of opportunities for their disabled populations, there are other countries in which most have not been able to achieve basic human rights. This makes the job of monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules extremely challenging.

9. Add to this the complexity and diversity within the disability movement itself and among the different types of disabilities. In many cases accessibility takes on a different meaning for people with different disabilities living in different geographical areas. This recognition of diversity has given rise to a richer culture within the disability movement, but it also requires that we monitor the equalization of opportunities in different ways by applying a variety of methods and looking at it from different angles and dimensions.

10. It has become increasingly clear to me that there is no one-size-fits-all way of dealing with and responding to the needs that are important to people with disabilities. I have attempted throughout my activities to keep this reality in mind.

B. Setting priorities

11. Based on a study of the disability movement, the work of the former Special Rapporteur and the recommendations he has made over the past 10 years, and in accordance with the mandate entrusted to me by the Commission on Social Development, I designed a work plan focusing on the following activities:

(a) Furthering the worldwide implementation of the Standard Rules;

(b) Monitoring and assessing the progress of implementation;

(c) Advocating;

(d) Raising awareness;

(e) Helping Governments identify barriers and obstacles to equalization and working with them on finding means of removing them;

(f) Strengthening interregional cooperation;

(g) Building the capacity of disabled persons' organizations.

12. At the same time, the issues of persons with disabilities in developing countries, particularly children, women and persons with intellectual, developmental and psychosocial disabilities, were given special consideration.

13. I have also decided that there is a need to focus on poverty and poverty reduction as they relate to issues of disability and the life situation of persons with disabilities. This is, therefore, the rationale behind the focus on specific target populations in developing countries.

14. The present report will:

(a) Summarize the main activities undertaken during the past year;

(b) Present the new initiatives developed;

(c) Discuss ongoing activities and planned activities;

(d) Identify the challenges faced by the international community, the disability movement, the emerging new international disability rights movement and the Special Rapporteur;

(e) Conclude with some recommendations on what I believe needs to be and can be done.

15. In fulfilling the duties of my mandate, I have undertaken the following activities:

(a) Initiating programmes, projects and activities;

(b) Consulting with Governments and policy and decision makers;

(c) Delivering speeches and lectures;

(d) Strengthening disabled persons' organizations and NGOs and participating in their meetings and congresses;

(e) Conducting regional consultations;

(f) Conducting surveys and in-house research;

(g) Coordinating with international and regional development organizations and agencies;

(h) Using the media to further the issues and raise awareness, granting interviews to the media and holding press conferences;

(i) Strengthening the relationship and involvement of the Panel of Experts in all aspects of the work;

(j) Communicating and corresponding with organizations and institutions regarding issues of disability;

(k) Supporting the work, initiatives, causes and demands made by persons with disabilities and their organizations and bringing them to the attention of their governments, international organizations and the United Nations.

II. Overview of developments in the implementation of the Standard Rules

A. Discussions with Governments

16. In many developing countries the Government is often the major, if not the sole, actor when it comes to setting policies, enacting legislation and delivering programmes. Due to the weakness of civil society in some countries in advocating and the lack of sufficient resources, issues relating to disabilities have often been pushed to the bottom of the list of government priorities.

17. In the last 12 months, I conducted several country visits. Some were in response to invitations from Governments or disabled persons' organizations, others were initiated on the basis of information and research or were based on the need to speed up, support or push forward certain initiatives or programmes.

18. The overall aim of the visits was to:

(a) Promote the Standard Rules;

(b) Advocate in favour of the equalization of opportunities;

(c) Discuss direct action with governments.

19. Other visits were in response to invitations to deliver speeches and lectures at conferences and congresses of disabled persons' organizations. Countries visited during 2004 include the following:

(a) Egypt (April);

(b) Jordan (April);

(c) Norway (June);

(d) Lebanon (June and August);

(e) Canada (September);

(f) Saudi Arabia (October);

(g) Guatemala (October);

(h) Mexico (October);

(i) Germany (November);

(j) United States of America (December).

20. All visits included meetings with government officials, including:

(a) Presidents and Heads of State;

(b) First Ladies;

(c) Speakers of the House and Congress;

(d) Ministers and deputy ministers in relevant Ministries;

(e) Officials representing the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

21. All meetings provided opportunities to encourage Governments to reaffirm their moral and political commitments to the implementation of the Standard Rules, and to share the state of their countries in relation to the issues of people with disabilities.

22. During these visits, discussions with officials centred on the need for comprehensive social change in order to achieve the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities and the ways in which to effect that change, including the importance of involving and listening to disabled persons' organizations. The visits also provided an opportunity to meet with regional, United Nations and international development agencies to explore ways of mainstreaming disability into their development programmes.

23. It was important also to meet with local and national disability councils and rehabilitation centres in order to listen to, learn from and share information with disabled persons' organizations, community-based service providers and parents of children with disabilities.

B. Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities (2004-2013)

24. Working closely with the Secretary-General of the Arab League, advocating for the issues of persons with disabilities in that region, and close consultations with

officials in April facilitated the adoption and declaration of the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities (2004-2013) at the summit meeting of the Arab League in May 2004. The Arab region is the last region in the world to adopt a decade for persons with disabilities and thereby place the issues of persons with disabilities among the priority policy areas of Arab Governments.

25. The adoption of the Decade provided the opportunity to start a dialogue at the highest levels with policy and decision makers and legislators. For example, working closely with the Speaker of Parliament of Lebanon and the President of the Federation of Arab Parliaments led to the formation of parliamentary committees in Arab Parliaments to legislate on disability issues. The commitment was put into practice and a decision was adopted at the Federation's meeting on 2 September 2004.

26. In that same context, and in order to shore up support for the Decade, meetings in Lebanon included discussions with the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister to promote and reinforce implementation of the Standard Rules.

27. I also met with the Head of the Parliamentary Committee on Education and with educators and school administrators working on integration and inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream education through parental and community involvement. I also visited an innovative rehabilitation centre that provides social, occupational, psychological and physical rehabilitation to persons with disabilities.

28. Within the context of the adoption of the Arab Decade, a meeting was organized in partnership with the Arab League and the Arab Organization for Disabled Persons in Lebanon, funded through the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability. The purpose of the meeting was to formulate a plan of action for the Arab Decade and to strengthen the document by injecting the spirit and philosophy of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities into the articles of the Decade.

29. The meeting brought together:

(a) Disabled persons' organizations from across the region;

(b) Regional development organizations (the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR));

(c) Representatives of the Asian/Pacific Decade and the African Decade;

(d) Members of the Panel of Experts representing international disabled persons' organizations (World Federation of the Deaf, World Blind Union, Disabled Peoples' International).

C. Disabled persons' organizations/government dialogue

30. Country visits facilitated disabled peoples' organizations to establish more direct dialogue with their Governments about their concerns and issues relating to

the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in ways that would produce tangible change in their lives.

31. The visit to Guatemala was made in response to an invitation extended by the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (Division of Disability Rights) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The visit included meetings with the Vice-President of the Republic, whose commitment to development and the rights of persons with disabilities set the tone for very constructive and fruitful meetings in that country.

32. I also discussed health and mental health issues with the Minister of Health with a focus on prevention and the provision of accessible and affordable health services for children, women and persons with disabilities, particularly in rural and indigenous communities.

33. The Deputy Minister of Labour and the President of the Congress expressed their support and recognized the need to provide gainful, meaningful employment for persons with disabilities, particularly the need to activate legislation dealing with the employment of persons with disabilities.

34. The same understanding and recognition were expressed by experts on inclusion and integration at the Ministry of Education. However, most initiatives and intentions remain constrained by the lack of financial resources.

35. A meeting with the Guatemala City Manager centred on disabled access in the city.

36. At all these meetings, a member of the Ombudsman's Office and the National Council for Persons with Disability was present.

37. An awareness of the need for change and the importance of the Standard Rules in Guatemala is constrained by the lack of resources, the enormity of the development agenda, the scale of the disability problem, particularly in the aftermath of over 30 years of armed conflict, and the abject poverty in some regions and communities that exacerbates disability.

38. The visit to Mexico enabled me to look more closely at a project in which Governments and disabled persons' organizations are jointly redesigning the physical, social and cultural environment to achieve the equalization of opportunities. The Mexican experience, in all its facets, is a very useful one for other countries to learn from, particularly in Latin America.

39. It is particularly noteworthy that in Mexico, the National Commission on Disability is directly linked to the Office of the President of the Republic and is headed by one of his closest aides.

40. The visit to Mexico was made in response to an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Disability Commission in the Office of the President of the Republic. Meetings were held with several ministries and governmental institutions, including:

(a) The President of the Republic;

(b) A representative of the Office of the First Lady;

(c) The cabinet minister responsible for disability;

(d) The Ministry of Education (Inclusion and Integration);

(e) The National Statistics Bureau;

(f) The Ministry of Health and experts in rehabilitation;

(g) The Ministry of Transportation.

D. Monitoring the progress in implementation of the Standard Rules

41. The need for accurate statistical data and information on disability has been reflected in the discussions at the Ad Hoc Committee meetings, in which representatives of both Governments and disabled persons' organizations have emphasized their importance in developing policies, legislating for disability and providing services to people with disabilities.

42. In that context, and as follow-up to the work of the former Rapporteur in this area, a global survey on government action on the implementation of the Standard Rules has been disseminated worldwide.

43. The survey covers the 22 standard rules, posing two questions in relation to each rule, covering policy, legislation, programmes, budget allocations, involvement of disabled persons' organizations and their effect on the lives of persons with disabilities. It has been sent to Governments or government bodies in all Member States and to two disabled persons' organizations per country.

44. In the instructions sent out with the survey, I made a recommendation to government bodies and departments to hold a workshop to bring together all governmental organizations involved in legislating on and providing services to persons with disabilities to answer the questions contained in the survey. This, I believe, will enhance intergovernmental cooperation and the quality of the responses. Responses from disabled persons' organizations to the same questions will increase the reliability of the answers.

45. The survey itself is both a monitoring and an awareness-raising tool, reminding Governments of the Standard Rules and the importance of the equalization of opportunities and the achievement of full participation in all aspects of life for persons with disabilities.

E. Facilitating the work of legislators

46. The establishment of committees in Arab Parliaments to legislate on disability issues does not mean that the laws will be drafted and enacted. In a region that lacks mechanisms and experience in this field and in which many negative attitudes towards disability still prevail, there is a need to build capacity and facilitate the work of these legislators on those issues.

47. Therefore, I am currently collaborating with the UNESCO Regional Office in the Arab States and ILO to design a series of workshops for legislators and parliamentarians to explain the concept, importance and impact of and practices relating to the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities and how these can be strengthened through legislation and relevant rules and regulations.

F. Interregional cooperation through joint parliamentary committees

48. Closely related to this process is the interregional cooperation being developed between Arab and European Parliaments. Because the equalization of opportunities is a global concept, it is important to open channels between regions to exchange information and experience on policies, to learn about legislation and to apply tried and true methods by example.

49. This exchange forms a basis for joint cooperation between the European and Arab Parliamentarians. During my recent visit to Germany, a series of meetings were held with members of the German Parliament specialized in disability legislation, in order to initiate this collaboration.

50. An agreement has been reached to involve German Parliamentarians in workshops and exchange programmes with the Arab region. These visits will also be used as public awareness-raising occasions through extensive media coverage.

51. This activity is also one that will be replicated in other regions of the world.

III. The Standard Rules, the Supplement and the Convention

52. It is impossible to present a report of this sort without touching upon the relationship between the Standard Rules, the Supplement to the Standard Rules and the Convention, and the role of the Special Rapporteur.

53. The role of the Special Rapporteur was stipulated in section IV of the Standard Rules. I believe that this document is a landmark in the history of disability awareness. The Rules were adopted after a long struggle and are the fruit of the efforts of the international community and dedicated disability rights advocates. This document has provided the international community with a set of norms and guiding procedures with regard to what needs to be done in order to improve the quality of everyone's life in society, including that of persons with disabilities.

54. Ten years of application and implementation of the Standard Rules have changed the landscape of disability awareness and the attitude of people regarding the nature, causes and implications of all types of disabilities. Yet this application revealed some shortcomings, which required the introduction of a Supplement. The progress made by the Standard Rules also reignited interest in drafting the Convention.

55. Today many are expressing uncertainty about the relationship between the Rules, the Supplement and the Convention.

56. I have no doubt that the two documents are complementary. While the Convention fulfils the need for a legally binding document, the Standard Rules (and their Supplement) represent the software for actualizing the text and the spirit of the Convention.

IV. Non-governmental organizations: strengthening disabled persons' organizations

A. Conferences and congresses of disabled persons' organizations

57. Specialized forums are the best place to reiterate the importance of the Standard Rules as a tool for achieving the equalization of opportunities. On that basis, I have tried whenever possible to participate in congresses, meetings and conferences.

58. During the past year I have had the opportunity to speak or present papers and lectures at 12 major international and regional events, and will continue to participate in many such activities until the end of my mandate.

59. Papers and lectures presented to date (September 2003-November 2004) include:

(a) "Recent developments in the Standard Rules", International Seminar on the Convention, Tokyo;

(b) "The right to participate and contribute to cultural life", The Right to Culture Conference, Amman;

(c) "Human rights for people with disabilities", UNHCR, Geneva;

(d) "The Standard Rules and Convention", Working Group Meeting on the Convention, Cairo;

(e) "Rehabilitation for persons with disabilities in developing countries", Rehabilitation International Conference, Oslo;

(f) "Disability in developing countries", keynote address at the Disabled Peoples' International Congress on Disability and Diversity, Winnipeg, Canada;

(g) "Including issues of women with disability in women's development programmes", regional meeting of the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, Beirut;

(h) "Injecting the spirit and philosophy of the Standard Rules into the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities", Arab Decade Expert Meeting, Beirut;

(i) "Children with psychosocial disabilities: global perspective", Conference on Children with Autism, Riyadh;

(j) "Importance of research and statistics", at the launch of the International Disability Rights Monitor research results, New York;

(k) "Equalization of opportunities: a goal for all action", opening address at the National Rehabilitation Centre, Second Regional Meeting of Experts, Mexico City;

(l) "Disability: reality and aspiration", Presidential Palace, Mexico City;

(m) "Updating the Standard Rules", Congress of the Federation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, Helsinki;

(n) "The Standard Rules: content, importance and present status", Asian Blind Union, Damascus.

B. The Panel of Experts

60. A Special Rapporteur on Disability would not be able to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted by the Commission on Social Development without the help, cooperation, advice and counsel of organizations of persons with disabilities and the panel of experts representing those organizations.

61. I was able to share many of my plans with them and have received their support on many issues. Three members of the panel were instrumental in supporting the efforts and facilitating the discussions at the meeting of experts held to formulate a plan of action for the implementation of the Arab Decade.

62. The draft of the Global Survey on Government Action on the Implementation of the Standard Rules was sent to the members of the panel of experts for their comments and feedback.

63. An Internet group was established to facilitate communications and exchanges of views with the panel of experts.

64. In some developing countries, the voices and opinions of disabled persons' organizations are slowly being heard and their views taken into consideration. This is not always true in all countries.

65. It is one of the priorities of my mandate to support disabled persons' organizations in developing countries to gain a foothold within the political advocacy system of their countries by providing them with the forums in which to voice their opinions and increase understanding of their needs and rights, and by facilitating exchanges between them and government officials and decision makers whenever disability issues are being discussed.

C. Regional consultations

66. Regional consultations have helped me understand the reality of disability on the ground from the real experts in the field and identify the challenges facing their organizations. They also bring together representatives of disabled persons' organizations to exchange views, ideas and information and share experiences. The aim of the regional consultation with disabled persons' organizations that took place in Mexico and the meeting with members of the National Council for Persons with Disability in Guatemala was also to listen to the issues brought out by the persons most concerned and relay, as well as possible, those issues to government officials and the United Nations development organizations.

67. To that end, disabled persons' organizations from the Arab region were invited to the expert meeting held in Beirut in August 2004 to develop a plan of action for the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities.

68. Participation at the second regional meeting of experts on integrated rehabilitation in Mexico was an opportunity to hold a regional consultation with disabled persons' organizations from the region. The consultation included representatives of disabled persons' organizations from 25 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Each presented three of the most pressing issues for people with disabilities in their countries. Detailed reports on those issues are

currently being sent to the Office of the Special Rapporteur and the information will be used in research that is being carried out on the state of disability in the world.

69. Meetings with disabled persons' organizations in Guatemala included member organizations of the National Council for Persons with Disability and addressed the concerns of disabled persons, including education, health, sign language, accessibility, and the issues of disabled persons in rural and indigenous communities.

70. In Mexico and Guatemala, representatives of disabled persons' organizations were present during government negotiations on health, accessibility, rehabilitation and education with various officials and ministries.

D. Interregional cooperation

71. A dynamic inter- and intraregional exchange on disability issues has been taking place together with the growing realization that the commonalities and differences among regions can be used as fertile grounds for learning. As Special Rapporteur, I am in a position to facilitate this exchange by providing a context for the learning experience to take place.

72. This was exemplified by the invitation extended to the Asian/Pacific and African Decades to participate in the meeting to draw up the plan of action for the Arab Decade. The panel of experts also participated in that meeting.

73. This participation brought regional and international experiences to the meeting and helped enrich the discussions that took place. Lessons learned and obstacles that may face implementation, as well as ways and means of overcoming them, helped steer the discussions towards more practical and results-oriented issues.

E. Raising awareness through the media

74. Awareness-raising takes many forms and uses many tools, but none is more powerful than the media in delivering the message and changing attitudes, outlooks and mindsets. One of the goals I established for the country visits was to use the local media at every possible opportunity to effect change.

75. In Egypt, Guatemala, Jordan, Lebanon and Mexico, the media played a significant role in raising awareness of the Standard Rules and the issues of persons with disabilities. At every opportunity I also tried to organize and hold press conferences and media interviews to relate what I had seen and to report on the issues discussed. At the press conference in Guatemala, the concerns, issues and needs of the indigenous community of Santiago Atitlan, where parents of children with disabilities have mobilized an entire community to respond to the needs of the children, and those of the community of ex-combatants with disabilities, were brought to the forefront and became the subject of newspaper articles and television news reports. This helped raise awareness of pressing issues, publicized the successes achieved by the communities and reminded the authorities of what needs to be done to live up to the commitments they made during our negotiations.

F. Changing attitudes through media

76. Equalization of opportunities is a concept that requires a change in attitude and behaviour. Existing attitudes and current behaviour are the result of ideas that people have inherited about disability and its causes. Changing attitudes requires ridding society of discrimination and prejudice and breaking down walls of superstition and ignorance. The media is the most powerful tool to effect this change and has been successful in changing attitudes at the public and social levels in many regions.

77. Based on this understanding, and in accordance with my mandate to promote the equalization of opportunities and encourage change at all levels, I have been promoting a massive media campaign to raise awareness and change both the image that people have of persons with disabilities and the image that persons with disabilities have of themselves.

78. The media campaign will be launched on local and satellite stations in the Arab region, where disability is still shrouded in shame and superstition and thought to be a curse and a misfortune for the entire family.

79. The campaign will encompass one-minute television spots that will highlight each of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities and demonstrate the abilities and potentials of persons with disability once opportunities are made available.

V. International and regional organizations

A. Networking

80. With the advances made in the drafting of the International Convention, there is growing international recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities as human rights. There is also a growing recognition that the issues of people with disabilities are either excluded or marginalized by international or regional development agencies and organizations.

81. It was brought to light, for example, at one of the meetings, that the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) does not have specific programmes targeting women with disabilities, nor are the issues of women with disabilities mainstreamed into the women's development programmes run by UNIFEM.

82. Establishing direct contact and encouraging networking between disabled persons' organizations and development organizations has become a priority activity. In Lebanon, as in Guatemala, meetings held with UNDP, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIFEM, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revealed the need for inter-agency coordination and willingness among United Nations agencies to find ways to avoid compartmentalization. As a result, joint projects on education inclusion and employment and training are currently under way with UNESCO and ILO in the Arab region.

B. Disability and development

83. Furthermore, raising awareness among the various development organizations on the need and the ways to mainstream and include disability issues in programmes dealing with poverty, health and nutrition, education, employment and training, environment and human rights has become a priority activity.

84. Building on the importance of mainstreaming disability issues into development programmes, a second survey has been distributed to 48 regional development organizations. The 13-question survey asks whether they have included disability issues in their programmes, how or why not, what kind of budget allocations have been made and whether the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were taken into consideration in designing their programmes.

VI. Conclusion

85. For me the past year was exciting and full of challenges. Through my work, I was encouraged by the determination of many dedicated leaders, advocates and activists. Their work demonstrated the limitless ability of the human spirit to overcome any obstacle. It is this tireless ability to strive for the betterment of our world and to create spaces in which all can be accepted as equals that I aspire to emulate through my work.

86. The task is not an easy one and the challenges are many. Only through a collaborative effort can we hope to create a world that will accept each of us with our diverse abilities, our weaknesses and strengths, and allow us to exercise that diversity in creating such a world.

87. All the achievements to date in this domain constitute only a small dent in the huge task that needs to be accomplished. Making true progress towards an enabling world requires the combined efforts of all at every level — international, regional, national, communal and familial.

88. Finally, I would like to say that despite the commitments shown by Member States to the promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and to the equalization of opportunities for full participation, most have not matched that commitment with a financial one.

89. I invite and encourage all Member States to make contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Disability in order to continue the valuable work of promoting and advancing the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.

VII. Recommendations

90. On the basis of the activities of the past and the knowledge gathered through consultations, I have compiled a list of recommendations.

A. Recommendations to Governments

1. Health and prevention

91. **While the past two decades have witnessed a drop in child mortality rates, communicable diseases and water-borne diseases, the levels are still high in some African, Asian and Latin American countries. While health care and prevention have been a target and a priority goal stated by many international, regional and national programmes, they are not being tackled with any consistency.**

92. Moreover, the programmes for action emanating from the World Summit for Children, the World Summit for Social Development and the World Conference on Women have all specified mother and child health, pre-, post- and neonatal health as priorities. These, too, remain outstanding commitments. Not dealing with these issues has led to an increase in disability among children.

93. **Commitments need to be renewed and efforts doubled to provide appropriate health care capable of preventing disabilities. For countries that claim that they do not have the resources to deal with issues of disability, I would say that addressing the causes and working on prevention can be far less costly.**

94. In addition to malnutrition, pollution and environmental factors and the lack of adequate pre- and post-natal health care, a large percentage of disabilities in many countries also results from drug abuse and road- and work-related accidents.

95. **Targeted, well-defined government and NGO-sponsored awareness-raising programmes that effect change, alter attitudes and influence behaviour can play a major role in curbing many behaviours that lead to disabilities.**

96. Given that over 60 per cent of disabilities are preventable and can be avoided through awareness-raising and early intervention, the importance of raising awareness at the public and national levels regarding the causes of disability, as well as more serious work at the level of prevention, should be emphasized.

97. Other traditional practices that lead to disabilities among young girls and children are early marriage and early childbearing.

98. **Governments need to get involved in a massive, culturally sensitive and directed public-awareness campaign addressing traditional customs and pointing out the fact that even time-honoured practices can be dangerous.**

2. Wars and violent conflict

99. In considering disability prevention, we cannot ignore one of the main causes of disability in many regions of the world today. There are more than 60 wars and armed conflicts raging throughout the world, to which a large percentage of disability can be attributed. There may be very little we can do about the realities of world politics. However, I believe there are lessons we can learn from the disability movement.

100. The root of most violent conflicts is inequality and social injustice, and dealing with these matters in an equitable and just manner may go a long way in curtailing some of the violence. **The equalization of opportunities is one way of dealing**

with unfair and unjust social systems and promoting a non-violent resolution of conflicts.

101. **Expanding our understanding of the equalization of opportunities to include all people and all aspects of human interaction and human development will certainly contribute to improving the lives of more than just the 600 million persons with disability around the world. Using the same rights-based approach that the disability movement espouses to include and guarantee full participation for marginalized and neglected groups can make a big difference.**

3. Statistics

102. Accurate statistical data and precise information on which policies and services can be based and delivered remain a major challenge for the disability movement as whole. One consolation is that there is a growing awareness of the need for accurate statistical information on disability, as demonstrated by the discussions of the ad hoc Committee meetings. The Disability Rights Monitor research in Latin America is an excellent source, and other regions need to follow suit.

103. Some of the numbers provided by the United Nations Statistics Division that are based on government reporting vary from 33 per cent disability in the most developed countries to 0.5 per cent in the least developed. This does not bode well for the accuracy of such information. Considering the link between poverty and disability, such numbers tend to blur the realities and diminish the impact th . sound development and poverty reduction strategies can have on the lives of persons with disabilities.

104. **I would urge Governments, through their national statistical bureaux and in collaboration with disabled persons' organizations and social and human development organizations, and with the help of regional United Nations organizations, to conduct specific, targeted, methodical data collection and analysis and to use that information to formulate policies and provide services to persons with disabilities. The United Nations Statistics Division can play a leading role in developing the capability of Governments and organizations to gather, compile, analyse, publish and disseminate data and statistics on disabilities.**

4. Relationship between Governments and disabled persons' organizations and NGOs

105. Closely related to the failure of awareness-raising to make a significant dent in the area of prevention is the sometimes adversarial relationship that exists between NGOs and disabled persons' organizations and their Governments.

106. In some countries, disabled persons' organizations are seen as adversary groups trying to undermine the role of Government and are accused by Governments of exaggerating problems in order to turn people against them and undermine their authority.

107. In many instances, the task of raising awareness and educating about prevention falls to NGOs and disabled persons' organizations that not only lack the resources and financial support needed for such a task, but are deprived of suitable

moral support by Governments, which themselves are incapable of reaching all people.

108. Democratization and participation means allowing others to shoulder some of the responsibilities and allowing people to speak for and represent themselves. Disabled persons' organizations represent a subculture whose contributions are valuable to the mainstream culture and also provide opportunities in which persons with disabilities can grow and develop their potential, advocate for their own issues and determine their contribution to society at every level.

109. **It is important that further progress be made to develop a more cooperative and supportive relationship between Governments and their national disabled person's organizations. Such a relationship could be advantageous not only to persons with disabilities themselves, but to society as a whole, and in turn to Governments themselves.**

5. Inclusion in education and full participation

110. Equalization of opportunity is aimed at creating a society inclusive of all, and education is the means by which to achieve such inclusion. It prepares society to accept differences and diversity. It helps individuals gain the knowledge, skills and mindset to act and interact with others, which is a requirement for full participation.

111. While some educational institutions and education ministries have accepted this concept of integration and inclusion in theory, implementation has fallen short. In many cases, when inclusion is implemented it is done without any training or grounding for persons with disabilities themselves, other students in the educational institution or teachers. There have been cases where parents have taken their children out of school when a child with a disability was introduced, or where teachers have categorically refused to admit a child with a disability into the classroom.

112. **Governments need to get involved by legislating inclusion into education that leads to full participation. Legislation needs to go hand in hand with guaranteeing all forms of accessibility within the educational system. It also needs to be coupled with awareness-raising and training for society as a whole and for staff of the educational system.**

B. Recommendation to Governments, disabled persons' organizations and collaborators

Rehabilitation

113. An encouraging development within the disability movement is the rethinking and revision of our understanding and practice of rehabilitation. It is not surprising that one of the unanimous positions taken during the ad hoc Committee meetings was for rehabilitation to be treated as a separate article from health and medical care.

114. A new understanding has emerged that community-based rehabilitation needs to deal with issues related to the lives of disabled peoples in all their aspects and to take into consideration the context in which people with disabilities live.

115. Some of the most successful community-based rehabilitation programmes are those in which families and the community play a central and vital role, in addition to the persons with disabilities themselves. A World Health Organization (WHO) report stated that 70 per cent of rehabilitation needs in developing countries can be met at the community and family level if people are given the moral, psychological and emotional tools and the confidence that they can rehabilitate not only persons with disabilities, but rehabilitate the community to accept them, to provide them with equal opportunities and to receive them as productive, active members.

116. **Disabled persons' organizations, the medical establishment and Governments need to be made to move away from the purely medical model of dealing with issues of disabilities and recognize that the disabled are persons first, and that their inclusion in society should be based on that criterion. Therefore, rehabilitation should address the person as whole at the social and professional levels, as well as the medical and therapeutic levels. Additionally, the medical establishment is called upon to respect, understand and make use of the psychological, emotional and professional energy available within the family in support of its members with disabilities.**

C. Recommendation to international organizations

Poverty

117. There is a definite and inextricable link between poverty and disability. Symptoms of poverty, such as inadequate medical care, unsafe environments and malnutrition, are all causes and exacerbators of disability. Poverty reduction programmes have begun to take disability into consideration, and organizations of persons with disability are being consulted on these issues. One example is the World Bank's Global Partnership for Disability and Development — an initiative aimed at incorporating the issue of disability into mainstream development.

118. However, many of these initiatives, despite their good intentions, have fallen short of fully addressing the issue. It is worth noting that the World Bank/International Monetary Fund Millennium Goals do not mention disability as a target area either overtly or covertly.

119. **There is a need to include disability, both programmatically and financially, in all the poverty reduction and development programmes, and to specifically spell out targets for persons with disability in the same way that they are spelled out for other vulnerable and marginalized groups.**

D. Recommendations to the United Nations and Member States

1. Routinizing monitoring and evaluation

120. The Standard Rules created a mechanism to monitor their implementation and provided for the appointment of the Special Rapporteur. However, monitoring the world situation in relation to the Standard Rules and the lives of persons with disability in a complex and diverse world, in which cultural interpretations of equality vary along a spectrum and country specificities dictate realization, should not be left to the Special Rapporteur alone.

121. **A monitoring body at arm's length from policy makers and legislators should be established within each country. It should include representatives from disabled persons' organizations, service providers and educators and be allocated a budget to conduct its monitoring activities. It should also be given the authority to issue reports and assessments regarding the measures taken to equalize opportunities for persons with disabilities.**

122. **Specific assessment measures should be developed for each country upon which to base the monitoring activities. In this way, information on the ground would be made available to the Special Rapporteur to be used in promoting, raising awareness of and advocating for issues of persons with disabilities.**

2. Revising our approach

123. Inter-agency cooperation should be strengthened. Despite the growing emphasis on disability rights as human rights, the development dimension should also be further emphasized, and initiatives such as those of the World Bank need to be strengthened. United Nations development agencies not only need to mainstream disability issues into their programmes, but should do so by working jointly on issues where their spheres of competency coincide.

E. Recommendation to the private sector

Including new partners

124. With many countries in the world moving towards a market economy, Governments can no longer afford the high cost of social programmes. The real financial power is in the hands of the private sector. Until now in many parts of the world, and in developing countries in particular, the private sector has been absent from offering any kind of support. It is time for this vital sector of the economy to get involved. This kind of involvement represents a social and m ral obligation and would be a sound economic decision.

125. **I urge business leaders everywhere to contribute to the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, not only through financial donations and contributions. It is necessary to provide career and job opportunities for persons with disabilities, to enhance workplace accessibility and to sponsor training programmes to enhance the skills and build the capacities of persons with disabilities, which would allow them to contribute to the economy and take responsibility for their own independent lives.**